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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000364

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2027

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: INDIA CHOOSES NATIONAL INTERESTS OVER HUMAN RIGHTS
IN ITS BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH BURMA

REF: CALCUTTA 00543

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Classified By: Ambassador David C. Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee visited Burma on January 19-22 to enlist the junta's help in India's counterterrorism efforts in the Northeast, to cooperate on the erection of border fences, and to attempt to secure a natural gas supply. The visit was trumpeted as a success for the GOI's counterterrorism efforts, with the GOI agreeing to help finance infrastructure projects in west and northwestern Burma that would facilitate Burmese army access to the insurgents operating from inhospitable border locations. The agreement would also provide India's only ASEAN neighbor with a wish list of military equipment including guns, helicopters, mortars, sonars, Islander aircraft, and possibly spares for its MIG fighters. In exchange, Burma has agreed to institutionalize India-Burma military cooperation to drive out Indian insurgent groups with havens on the Burmese side of the border including the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), and secessionist factions from Manipur. The GOI failed to cement a deal with Burma on the purchase of natural gas, as Burma has deferred any decisions until it establishes the extent of reserves in the A-3 Block field. Burmese officials noted that India is up against some stiff price competition by "aggressive competitors" (read: China). Ambassador Mulford met with India's National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan on

January 22 and protested India supplying arms to a the Burmese regime. END SUMMARY.

----- Expanding Military Cooperation -----

12. (C) "The Times of India" reported on 22 January that General Maung Aye, Vice Senior General and Vice Chairman of State Peace and Development Council and number two in the junta's food chain, accepted FM Mukherjee's proposal to "institutionalize cooperation between their armies for operations against ULFA" and has instructed his rank and file to work out operational understandings with its Indian counterparts. Although not specifically refuting Defense Minister A.K. Anthony's announcement on 11 January ruling out joint operations, the new agreement indicates that Indian-Burma relations may be heading in that direction and military assistance clearly surpasses Anthony's characterization of arms supplies, training, and joint exercises as "happening on a low scale." The 22 January edition of "The Hindu" noted that the GOI has granted the request of General Thura Shwe Mann, the third in the chain of the Burmese junta's command, for military equipment submitted on his December 2006 visit to New Delhi. "The Hindu" cites GOI officials as stating that they will not provide details of the arms transfers until they become a reality. However, "The Times of India" quotes independent sources as saying that thirty-five 105MM field guns, helicopters, mortars, submarine detecting sonars, and Islander aircraft are included in the deal. Mukherjee admitted that the junta has sought Indian assistance in servicing its MIG fighter fleet, but noted that Russian permission will have to be sought. Russia's assent could come as early as Russian Defense Minister Ivanov's visit to New Delhi on 22-26 January or President Putin's state visit on 25-26 January.

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----- Answering the call for help -----

13. (C) Media reports that General Maung Aye was receptive to coordinating military efforts to drive out the Indian insurgents operating along the border. The General noted, however, that the border terrain was inaccessible to mechanized forces. Mukherjee reportedly sympathized with the junta's plight and offered any assistance needed to build up infrastructure in the region for larger military operations. Mukherjee was reportedly careful to note that, "of course, we didn't mention joint operations because that is not possible." "The Hindu" reports further that the General suggested that infrastructure issues be discussed in more depth at the operations level.

----- Erecting border fences -----

14. (C) In a January 20 meeting with Prime Minister Soe Win, Mukherjee reportedly discussed expediting fence construction on the border, particularly in the Kabea valley region bordering India's state of Manipur. Mukherjee was quoted as saying that "we hope that this will now be expedited."

----- No deal on natural gas -----

15. (C) Mukherjee sought assurances that Burma would provide the GOI with a long-term supply of natural gas in order to make construction of a Burma-to-India pipeline that bypasses Bangladesh feasible. However, Burma declined to confirm that supply levels were available until a full study of the Block A3 field was completed in April 2007. If the field study shows over 5 trillion cubic feet of gas, and India offers a competitive price, then the gas may be forthcoming. The "Times of India" noted that there was "aggressive competition" for Burma's natural gas (probably referring to China), and the GOI would have to offer a competitive price.

16. (C) In a January 19 meeting with O.P. Mishra, who is a former member of the GOI's National Security Advisory Board

and Director of the Eastern India office of the Global India Foundation, a new think tank, DCM discussed perspectives on Burma-India relations. Mishra, a Congress party member and close Mukherjee advisor, explained that India had "lost out" by insisting on democracy in Burma, and that China had gained as a result. "At the government level," he said, "India really suffered because of our love for democracy." While saying, "Nobody wants a dictator in Burma," Mishra added that the GOI was trying to upgrade its level of engagement with Burma and increase its stake there so as to influence the Burmese government in the long term. "The Chinese are everywhere, especially in a security context," Mishra observed. DCM asked Mishra if the U.S. and India could improve collaboration vis-a-vis Burma. Mishra answered that the U.S. should revisit its Burma policy. "We have to work on how we can influence (Burma), but we're learning from (the) U.S. how to co-exist with various types of regimes."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: It is clear that national interests in the form of counterterrorism exercises and the drive for reliable energy supplies rule the day in India-Burma relations. For India, cozying up to Burma also serves as a potential counterweight to increasing Chinese influence in the region.

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There is a sentiment among some in the GOI that India has "lost out" to China by its past insistence on democratic principles in Burma, and that by upgrading the level of engagement India can better influence the junta in coming years. Ambassador Mulford and embassy officers continue to make the case at every opportunity that democratic governance and human rights should be taken into account in any interaction with Burma, but so far that message has fallen on deaf ears. Given the recent increase in ULFA's terrorist activities, we do not foresee any changes in India's Burma policy in the near future. END COMMENT.

MULFORD